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Mediating Role of Brand Trust between Perceived External Prestige and Brand Satisfaction: Evidence from Smartphone Users

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - The main purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of perceived external prestige on brand satisfaction of smartphone users of Pakistan and mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between perceived external prestige and brand satisfaction. This study posits that for the users' satisfaction with brand, reputation of the brand among their friends, colleagues and society is major determinant.

Design/methodology/approach –The data were collected from the smartphone users of Pakistan. The link of online questionnaires was shared through Facebook messages, and email. Paper pencil questionnaires were distributed among the students of different campuses of University of Sindh Jamshoro. In this study, convenience sampling technique was used for collection of data. The sample size in this study consisted of 250 smartphone consumers. Structural Equation Modeling through AMOS 21 is used to test structural model to test the validity of model and hypothesis testing.

Findings - The findings indicate that there is a positive and significant relationship of perceived external prestige with brand trust and brand satisfaction. Brand trust also fully mediates the positive relationship between perceived external prestige and brand satisfaction. Mediating model explains 61% variance in the dependent variable.

Practical implications – For the managers and marketers of smartphones, findings of this study are helpful in understanding the importance of brand prestige in the eyes of users. Marketers should focus on enhancing brand prestige perception by disseminating information related to its features and benefits and increase positive word of mouth to enhance brand trust and satisfaction.

Originality/value – This study is first in the nature to develop and test the model of perceived external prestige in smartphone users' context. Previous studies have focused on word of mouth perceptions, but insights of prestige perceptions will guide practitioners to position their brands at new horizon in the minds of customers. This study provides theoretical and practical implication which will enhance satisfaction of smart phone users.

Keywords: Brand trust, brand satisfaction, perceived external prestige, smart phone users, SEM

1. INTRODUCTION

The telecom sector of Pakistan has become great source of social, economic and fiscal benefits for Pakistan as it has brought more than 7 billion USD in terms of Foreign direct investment, generated revenue of 30 billion USD and created thousands of jobs (Imtiaz, Khan, & Shakir, 2015). With the introduction of 3G and 4G technology, demand

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for broadband and internet services has also increased manifold and so for the smartphones. Smartphones have become very popular in recent years due to its widespread use which range for location tracking, data transfer, internet usage, social media, and personal contents (de Reuver, Nikou, & Bouwman, 2015). This popularity of smartphone has also increased risks for users of mobile phones such as hacking of the data, breach of privacy and also raised the issue of cost consciousness (de Reuver et al., 2015). Therefore, academic researchers and marketers worry to focus on the issues which are related to consumer satisfaction with brands.

Researcher has taken interest in testing variety of subjects including brand prestige, convenience, brand image, corporate reputation and perceived enjoyment. Research also indicate that these factors play an important role in building brand equity, brand satisfaction and other behaviors such as purchase intention. Brands have ability to attract consumers. Prestigious brand such that those brands which are well-talked about in outside world will have greater ability to attract the consumers. No any research has documented evidence of impact of perceived external prestige in higher education sector in developing organizational attachment of faculty members, administrators and staff. Although research also evidences the importance of perceived external prestige in other brands such as coffee brands (Choi, Ok, & Hyun, 2017). Applying social identity theory which entails that person's self-concept and satisfaction is developed with regards to his feeling of pride in the organization or brand to which he/she is attached (Highhouse, Thornbury, & Little, 2007). There is no study regarding the prestige perception of the users of mobile phone Pakistan.

As the Perceived External Prestige is considered as employee belief about a company and its corporate reputation influenced by popular external opinion of the people outside the organization (Carmeli & Freund, 2002; Turner, McIntosh, Reid, & Buckley, 2019; Udir Mišič & Podnar, 2019). In the smartphone market, it may be the image in the eyes of consumers of mobile phones which is developed through the views and experiences expressed and shared by surrounding people. Literature suggests that perceived external prestige is distinct from image and reputation of a company or brand. PEP is how consumers perceive the image of a brand or company and image and

reputation is what an organization or brand projects about the itself (Elsbach & Cable, 2018; Newburry, Deephouse, & Gardberg, 2019).

Social identity theory (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019; Trepte & Loy, 2017) which entails that person's self-concept and satisfaction is developed with regards to his feeling of pride in the organization or brand to which he/she is attached". Self-categorization theory posts that individuals categorize themselves and in the process of social comparison, they show their attachment with some group and seek fair appreciation of one's own in-group (Trepte & Loy, 2017). In other words, if they feel that the group to which belong has a superior positioning in the society, they tend to evaluate themselves how much they adhere to the characteristics of the group in terms of power and possession the group members in comparison to the focal person. Degree to which this match is higher, individual tend to follow the group direction, in order to maintain the membership and sense of belonging to that group. In the context of smartphone use, we believe that individual decision making will be dependent upon the evaluation from the group or how much that particular brand is popular in the eyes of that group. This line of thinking intrigues us to test "Whether perceived external prestige will lead to brand trust and brand satisfaction in smartphone users?

Therefore, this study investigates the factors that impact Perceived External Prestige toward users' satisfaction with brand, and whether the users trust to the original brand can impact consumer's level of satisfaction with that brand. Next section provides introduction of variables in this study and reviews the literature. Followed by methodology and results.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Perceived External Prestige

Prestige refers to the feeling of greater status with regard to some object or person. Brand prestige refers to higher status in the minds of users / consumers for the product or the service of a particular brand (Peasley, Coleman, & Royne, 2018; Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003) Perceived external prestige refers to the individual perceptions of their organization, or brand in the eyes of outside world. External prestige

has been tested in organizational context (see table 1), no any definition of external prestige with regard to a brand is found. Perceived external prestige of an organization refers employee perceptions of outsiders view for their organization (Smidts, Pruyn, & Riel, 2001). From social identity perspective, when employee perceive that their organization is prestigious and bears high status in the eyes of outsiders, they tend to show greater identification, commitment and lesser turnover intention (Ciftcioglu, 2011; J. Bryan Fuller, Hester, Barnett, Frey, & Relyea, 2006; Jerry Bryan Fuller et al., 2016; Gkorezis, Mylonas, & Petridou, 2012; Herrbach, Mignonac, & Gatignon, 2004; Mignonac, Herrbach, Serrano Archimi, & Manville, 2018; Smidts et al., 2001; Udir Mišič & Podnar, 2019).

In the same way, it is argued that if users of particular brand perceive that the brand, they use bears greater status and prestige in the eyes of other users and non-users, they will likely to trust the brand and show greater brand satisfaction. A study of US coffee houses found that brand experience and brand personality directly impacted brand prestige which then lead to brand loyalty attitude and behaviour (Choi et al., 2017).

Literature also suggests that when consumers receive positive information about a brand from peers and co-users, they believe in the authenticity of the brand and it leads to their enhanced trust in the brand. Portal, Abratt, and Bendixen (2018) tested role of brand authenticity in developing brand trust. They found positive association of consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity and brand trust.

Table 1. Nomological net of perceived external prestige (organizational context)

Variable	Relationship	Sector / Country	Citation
Affective organizational commitment	Positive	Israeli health care system	(Carmeli, 2005)
Organizational identification	Positive	Police organization / Netherland Citizens Service Centers / Greece	(Bartels, Pruyn, de Jong, & Joustra, 2007 ; Gkorezis et al., 2012)
Communication climate	Positive	Police organization / Netherland	(Bartels et al., 2007)
Customer oriented citizenship behaviour	Positive	hotels	(Kang & Bartlett, 2013)

psychological empowerment	Positive	hotels	(Kang & Bartlett, 2013)
organization-based self-esteem	Positive	hotels	(Kang & Bartlett, 2013)
Job satisfaction	Positive	hotels	(Tuna, Ghazzawi, Yesiltas, Tuna, & Arslan, 2016a)
Turnover intention	Negative	Engineering company / Canada	(Guerrero & Challiol-Jeanblanc, 2017)

In a very recent article published in AMJ by two Pakistani and a French author, impact of CSR directed at external and internal stakeholders on organizational identification was assessed. Based on data from French and Pakistani organizations, authors found that external CSR activities enhance perceived external prestige which in turn increase organizational identification whereas internally oriented CSR activities enhance perceived respect which in turn increase identification (Farooq, Rupp, & Farooq, 2017).

Recent study which investigated female consumers' attitude and purchase behaviour towards luxury cosmetic brands found important role of status values in development of attitude and behavior towards luxury cosmetic brands (Ajitha & Sivakumar, 2017). Authors consider that young people and students are directed more by age than income level and are more concerned about status perception, social visibility and conformity, may therefore be focused in future research as regards their attitudes and behaviours towards brand that 'reflect their image and meet their needs' (Ajitha & Sivakumar, 2017, p. 110).

2.2. Brand Satisfaction

Brand satisfaction is important determinant of economic success of any organization which relies heavily on market mechanism in terms of volume of products purchased, loyalty of customers and profitability of business (Kocyigit & Ringle, 2011). Brand satisfaction in marketing literature is defined as consumer's evaluation of product performance based on prior expectations after he / she consumes it (Tse & Wilton, 1988, p. 204). Brand satisfaction is also defined in terms of emotional response of consumer

experiences of products, services or some features of products or services. (Westbrook & Reilly, 1983). It is discrepancy between what is received in comparison to what was expected.

Brand satisfaction positively relates to brand loyalty and future buying behaviour (Ha & John, 2009). It may also generate positive word of mouth which will further lead to brand equity and loyalty (Mabkhot, Salleh, & Shaari, 2016). Research suggests that important predictor of brand satisfaction include brand personality (Mabkhot et al., 2016). A recent study which tested relationship between brand trust and brand image found that brand image was positively related to brand trust. Authors suggest that future research should include brand satisfaction in the model (Chinomona, 2016).

2.3. Brand Trust

Inclusion of trust in marketing research is very recent until the introduction of commitment – trust as key facilitating mechanism in relational marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). traditional view of trust in organizational behaviour research indicate a person's feeling of security that his her partner will not be little him and will strive to extend favors and positive attitude towards him (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alema, 2001). In the domain of brands, trust refers to consumer's feeling of security that a particular brand will meet his / her consumption expectations (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alema, 2001, p. 1242). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) define brand trust as "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function". Trust stems from a calculative process in which a person evaluates an object (or a brand) whether it has a requisite ability to satisfy obligated promises (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Doney & Cannon, 1997, p. 37).

2.4. Mediating Role of Brand Trust

Research suggests that there are direct as well as indirect sources of brand trust. Direct sources include consumer's experience of that brand by using it or trialing it. Indirect sources include positive word of mouth, reputation of brand, brand image and advertising (Hsu, 2012). Research also suggests that brand trust formed due to positive image of brand may lead to brand satisfaction. A study of consumers of electronic products revealed positive association among brand image, brand trust, and brand

satisfaction. Brand trust also mediates the positive association between brand image and brand equity (Chen, 2010).

Prestige perceptions vary across cultures. Research indicate that western cultures such as USA, people prefer comfort and ease whereas in some Asian cultures prestige perception is preferred (Choi et al., 2017). Choi et al. (2017) who found positive impact of brand personality traits and brand experience on brand loyalty through brand prestige argue that future research may explore the brand prestige perceptions in Asian countries as there is dearth of studies to test the impact of brand trust, brand personality, brand prestige perceptions may have on consumer satisfaction with brand (Choi et al., 2017, p. 1188). Results also suggest that when consumers feel that brand they own are prestigious, they build identification with brand which lead to their higher engagement with the brands (Tuškej & Podnar, 2018). Brand trust not only satisfies employees but it also mitigates negative attitudes (Mignonac et al., 2018; Serrano Archimi, Reynaud, Yasin, & Bhatti, 2018). Nysveen, Oklevik, and Pedersen (2018) also found mediating role of brand trust in brand image and brand satisfaction.

Based on above discussion this study formulated following hypotheses:

- H₁.** *Perceived external prestige is positively and significantly related to brand satisfaction.*
- H₂.** *Brand trust is positively and significantly related to brand satisfaction.*
- H₃.** *Perceived external prestige is positively and significantly related to brand trust.*
- H₄.** *Brand trust mediates the relationship between perceived external prestige and brand satisfaction.*

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research hypotheses proposed by this study were empirically tested using a questionnaire-based survey of Smartphone users across the Pakistan. The link of online questionnaires was shared through Facebook messages, and email. Paper pencil questionnaires were distributed among the students of Sindh University, Jamshoro. In this study, Convenience sampling was used for collection of data. The sample size in this study consisted of 250 mobile phone consumers.

3.1.Measures

The study adopted closed ended questionnaire method to obtain responses from participants. First section included information regarding demographic variables including gender, marital status, and education. Second section contained items representing study variables Five-point Likert scale was used to record responses; 1 representing strongly disagree to 5 representing strongly agree.

For perceived external prestige this study used 3 – item scale used by (Bartels et al., 2007) originally developed by Smidts et al. (2001). Internal consistency reported by Smidts et al. (2001) and (Bartels et al., 2007) were $\alpha = .73$ and $\alpha = .78$ respectively. Original scale for the both studies was in the context of organizations and this study mildly adapted the scales to suit the context of this study. Sample items include “This brand has a good reputation.” and “This brand is regarded as prestigious to use”. Cronbach’s alpha obtained by this study was $\alpha = .73$.

Brand trust was measured using four-item scale developed by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001). Authors obtained Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha = .81$. four items represent consumers’ trust, reliance, feeling of safety and perception of honesty with regards to brand. Coefficient alpha for this study was $\alpha = .68$. Brand Satisfaction was measured using 4 items adopted from different studies such as (Caruana, Money, & Berthon, 2000; Grace & O’Cass, 2005). This study obtained Cronbach’s Alpha of $\alpha = .828$.

Table 2. Summary of measures

Variables	Source
Brand Trust	Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001)
Brand satisfaction	Zehir, Sahin, Kitapçı, and Özsahin (2011)
Perceived External Prestige	(Bartels et al., 2007; Mathe & Scott-Halsell, 2012)

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Sample Demographics

Sample consisted of 250 users of smart phones. There were 68 % male users and 32% female users. Study reveals that considerable percentage of young females in Pakistan have access to smart phones which is positive approach in conventional country where females are deprived of luxury possessions. From age perspective, large proportion of sample comprised young users in the age bracket of 21 to 30 years (77%). Whereas users falling in the age bracket of 40 years and above were 10%. 80 percent users shown their education level as bachelors and 10% were M.Phil. degree holders.

Descriptive Statistics					
Variable code	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
MPEP	250	3.8889	.88715	-1.553	2.588
MBT	250	3.6535	.81113	-.772	1.014
MBS	250	3.6179	.77750	-.731	.446

Descriptive statistics were calculated to overview the data. Results presented in Table 3 indicate that perceived external prestige had highest mean score (Mean = 3.88, SD = .88), followed by Brand Trust (Mean = 3.65; SD = .81). mean score of brand satisfaction was also above the mid-range of 3 i.e. (Mean = 3.6; SD = .77). As responses were recorded on five-point Likert scale, mean score above 3 indicate higher level of agreement of respondents with their perception of external prestige, brand trust and brand satisfaction. Moreover, values of skewness and kurtosis used to check normality of data range from -.73 to .1.5 for Kurtosis and .44 to 2.58 for Kurtosis fall are in the acceptable range of ± 3 , thus, indicate normality of data

Structural Equation Modelling Through AMOS

To measure complex relationships between latent and observable variables, structural equation modelling is used through Analysis of moment structure software (Arbuckle, 1999, 2009). AMOS is widely used software for analyzing complex models through structural equation modeling (Kline, 2015). To conduct SEM, two step approach as suggested by (Nizar & Chagani, 2016) was followed. In first step measurement model

is tested to check the validity and fitness of model to the data. Second step converts conceptual model into structural model and tests relationships between latent variables and observed variables.

4.2.1. Measurement Model

To check the validity and fitness of measurement model, criteria of factor loadings, average variance extracted, and composite reliability was used. Factor loadings show the correlation between latent and observed variable. Table 2 reveals that all factor loadings are greater than threshold of .70 except four items whose factor loadings are greater than .60 are also acceptable (Byrne, 2016; Cua, McKone, & Schroeder, 2001; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). Average variance extracted and Composite reliability show the convergent validity of the constructs used in this study. All values of CR and AVE are above threshold of .70 and .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) thus indicate convergent validity of measurement model of this study.

Table: 3. Factor loadings, CR and AVE				
ITEM	PEP	BT	BS	
PEP-1	.767			
PEP-2	.729			
PEP-3	.836			
BT-1		.652		
BT-2		.698		
BT-3		.817		
BT-4		.679		
BS-1			.637	
BS-2			.845	
BS-3			.713	
BS-4			.775	
CR	.84	.80	.88	
AVE	.64	.52	.65	

4.2.2. Structural Model

After validating measurement model, it is necessary to develop and validate structural model to see its fitness to data and ability to predict hypothesized relationships. As this study has used a mediation model, therefore approach used by (Baron & Kenny,

1986) is used to test mediation effects of brand trust between perceived external prestige and brand satisfaction. This approach through criticized is still widely used in the literature as it is easy to use and understand (Bakari et al., 2017; Hayes, 2009).

Figure 2. Direct effects (non-mediating model)

Table 4 Direct effects					
Constructs' relationship			Estimate	P-Value	Hypothesis Support
BS	<---	PEP	.718	***	H ₁ accepted

Figure 3. Indirect effects (Mediating / Structural model)

Table 5. Indirect effects

Constructs' relationship			Estimate	P-Value	Hypothesis Support
BT	<---	PEP	0.914	***	H ₂ accepted
BS	<---	BT	0.749	***	H ₃ accepted

Table 6. Mediation of Brand Trust

Variables			Direct Effects		Indirect Effects		Hypothesis Support
			Estimate	P-Value	Estimate	P-Value	
BS	←	PEP	.492	***	0.032	.958	H ₄ accepted (Full mediation)

Table 5 shows the difference between mediating and non-mediating models (figure 1 and figure 2). It indicates that regression estimate between PEP and Brand satisfaction in non-mediating model was ($\beta = .72$; $p = 0.001$) and after introduction of mediator that is brand Trust in the model this coefficient decreased to ($\beta = .032$; $p = ns$). Decrease of beta coefficient and significant p value indicate that brand trust fully mediates the relationship between PEP and brand satisfaction.

4.2.3. Comparison of Model Fit Indices

Two models are compared for model fitness. Results indicate that mediating model fits well to the data as compared to non-mediating model. Chi square value of mediating model is lower than that of non-mediating model, that is, 1.458 and 1.746. respectively. Whereas RMSEA value of non-mediating model surpasses the acceptable range of less than .10 and the same for mediating model is unacceptable range, that is, .090. In terms of percent variance explained by the predictor variable, R Square, mediating model is better than non-mediating model as it explains 9% more variance than non-mediating model. ($R^2 = 52\%$ and 61% respectively) In short, mediating model fits well to the data and shares more variance as compared to non-mediating model.

<i>Table 7. Comparison of fit indices</i>			
Indicator	Value		Acceptable range
	Non-mediating Model	Mediating Model	
Chi-Square	1.746.	1.458	(1.00< CMIN/ DF <5.00)
CFA	.943	.935	(0.90< CFI <1.00)
RMSEA	.115	.090	(0.01< RMSEA<1.00)

5. DISCUSSION

This study developed and tested a conceptual model investigating the relationships between perceived external prestige, brand trust and brand satisfaction. More specifically this study tested impact of PEP on brand satisfaction (Hypothesis 1), impact of PEP on brand trust (Hypothesis 2), brand trust and brand satisfaction (hypothesis 3) and mediating role of brand trust between positive relationship of PEP with brand satisfaction. Results indicate that all hypothesis were supported. PEP is positively and significantly related to brand trust and brand satisfaction. Brand trust also positively related to brand satisfaction and Brand trust also fully mediates the relationship between PEP and brand satisfaction.

These results are in line with the literature. Research in organizational context indicates that perceived external prestige of social workers regarding their non-profit organizations positively predicted job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Job satisfaction also mediated the relationship between PEP and organizational deviance behaviour (Tuna, Ghazzawi, Yesiltas, Tuna, & Arslan, 2016b). A recent study of graduated also suggested that university students attitude towards brand is affected by perceived external prestige (Simiyu, Komen, & Bonuke, 2019). Brand benefits are classified as utilitarian benefits (functional benefits) and hedonic benefits (perceived enjoyment and emotional attachment). Research indicate that hedonic benefits resulting from emotional attachment derived through perceived brand image impact brand trust positively (Bennur & Jin, 2016).

Research also suggests that brand trust formed due to positive image of brand may lead to brand satisfaction. A study of consumers of electronic products revealed

positive relationship between brand image, brand trust, brand satisfaction and brand equity. Brand trust also mediate the positive relationship between brand image and brand equity (Chen, 2010). A study of Malaysian automobile brands revealed that brand satisfaction is positively related to brand loyalty and also mediated the positive impact of brand personality (Mabkhot et al., 2016). This study is significant in the sense that most of studies on perceived external prestige have been conducted in organizational context and in western cultures (Batt & Bruhn, 2019; De Stobbeleir et al., 2018; Gkorezis, Erdogan, Xanthopoulou, & Bellou, 2019), this study is first of its kind which has considered smartphone users and taken data from youth who are most prominent consumers of smartphones in Pakistan (Khan, Khalid, & Iqbal, 2019; Nand, Pitafi, Kanwal, Pitafi, & Rasheed, 2019).

5.1. Limitation and Future Research Areas

This study is not free from limitations. Sample size of this study is low, future research may get data from diverse samples across Pakistan. Future research may continue to investigate the role of Perceived External Prestige in development of brand Loyalty, brand image and purchase intention. This study tested impact of perceived prestige on brand satisfaction through brand trust. Future research may test impact of perceived prestige on brand trust through brand satisfaction.

5.2. Practical Implication

This study is first in its nature which has integrated Perceived External prestige in Pakistani mobile market. In order to develop brand satisfaction, mobile companies need to develop strategies to increase perception of prestige among customers through specific advertising activities. Because as research suggests people in Asian culture are status conscious (Choi et al., 2017), therefore any effort which may raise the status of a brand in the eyes of consumers will foster positive word of mouth which will in turn develop trust, satisfaction and loyalty with brand.

6. CONCLUSION

Perceived external prestige and corporate reputation are important indicators of service customer's satisfaction with Brands, organization and service. Brand trust is also

an important contributor in relationship between prestige and satisfaction. When employees feel that there the brand has positive reputation among their friends, colleagues and society as a whole, they tend to develop trust in that brand that may lead to their satisfaction.

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